

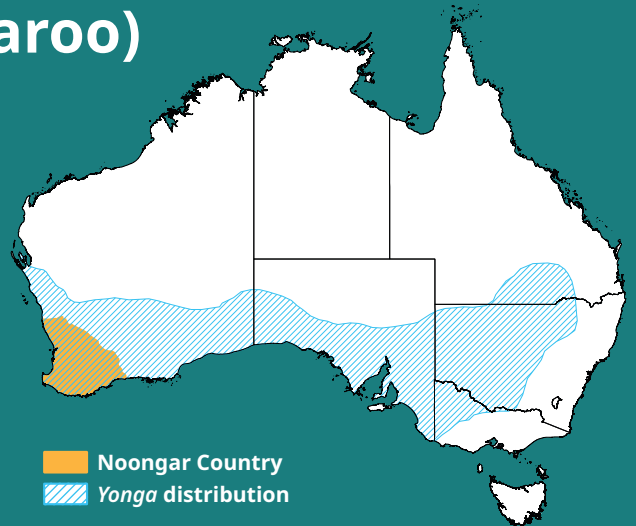
Yonga (Western grey kangaroo) on Noongar Country

© David Wardong Collard, Noongar

Common name: Western grey kangaroo

Scientific name: *Macropus fuliginosus*

Language names: *Yonga*, *Yongka* (male) and *Waar* (female)



Status



Description

Yonga are one of the larger macropods in Australia and are closely related to the Eastern grey kangaroo. They feed at night mainly on grasses and herbs.

Yonga are very social, living in groups of up to 15 (mobs). They keep close family bonds – a daughter often stays close to her mother even after she has a joey of her own.



Yonga. Photo: [phototrip.cz/stock.adobe.com](https://www.phototrip.cz/stock.adobe.com)

Distribution

Yonga are found across southern Australia from Shark Bay in Western Australia across to the New South Wales-Queensland border in the east¹. They are not found in the east of New South Wales or Victoria.

Habitat

Yonga live in a variety of habitats such as dry open woodland, forests, mallee scrubland, coastal heathland and grasslands.

Threats

The main threats to *Yonga* include:

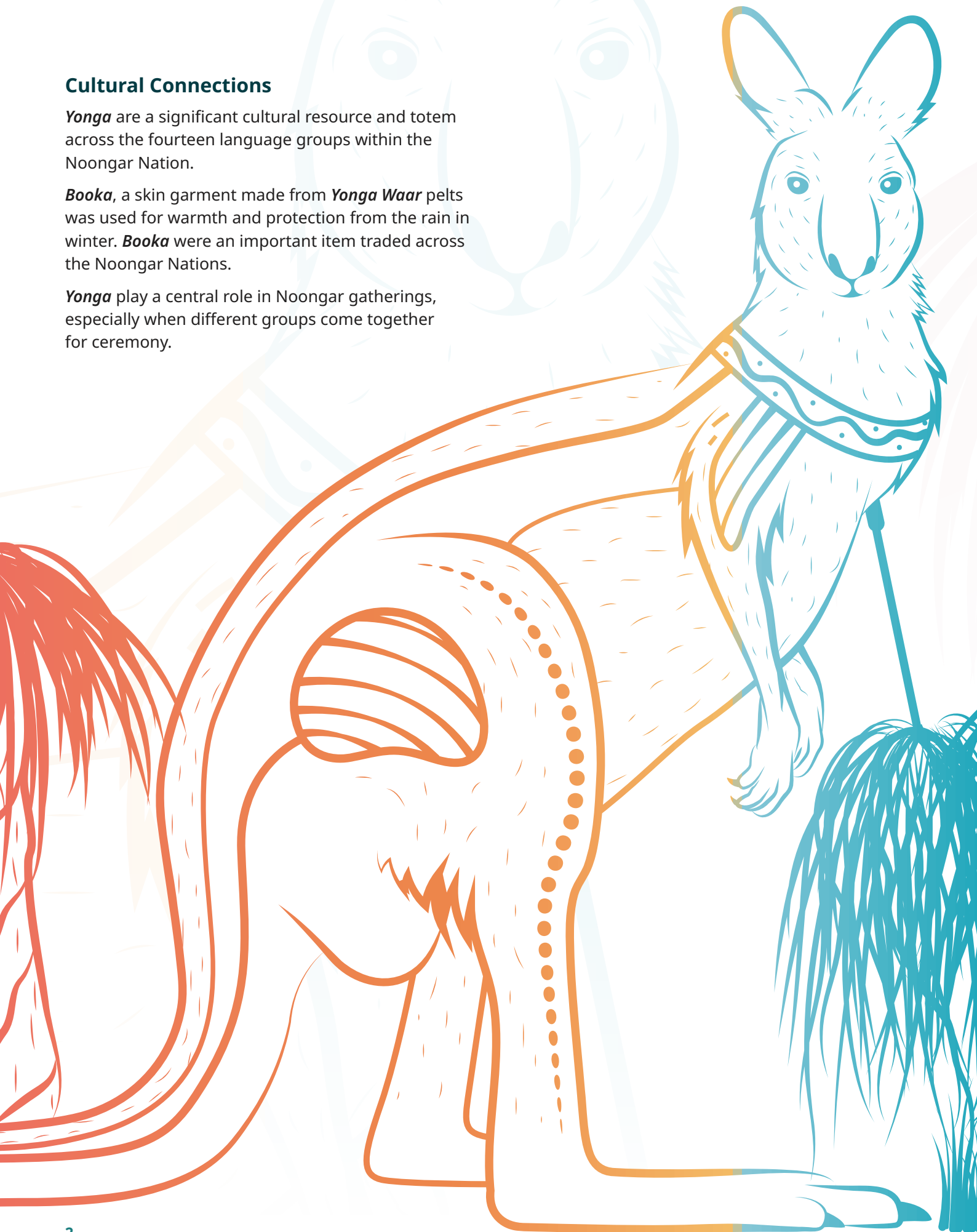
- **Wrong-way fire**, including out-of-season fires, too frequent fires and large, hot wildfire events
- **Groundwater over-extraction**, leading to reduced water availability
- **Vehicle strike**
- **Climate change**, including tree dieback associated with extreme temperatures and more frequent drought events
- **Mining, as well as urban and agricultural development**, leading to habitat destruction, fragmentation or degradation (such as increased salinity)
- **Agricultural practices**, including fencing, shooting and the introduction of artificial water sources
- **Weed encroachment**, leading to a decline in habitat quality.

Cultural Connections

Yonga are a significant cultural resource and totem across the fourteen language groups within the Noongar Nation.

Booka, a skin garment made from *Yonga Waar* pelts was used for warmth and protection from the rain in winter. *Booka* were an important item traded across the Noongar Nations.

Yonga play a central role in Noongar gatherings, especially when different groups come together for ceremony.





Cultural Values

Country

It is an important part of Noongar Lore and practice to only eat foods like **Yonga** when they are abundant and in the right season. This ensures natural resources are not depleted and will still be available for the next year.

“Yonga is good eating and often feature as bush meat in community gatherings, so we make sure we only take Yonga according to our cultural practice.”

David Wardong Collard, Noongar

Knowledge

Noongar used their knowledge to look after **Yonga** and Country. They burnt the grass to promote new growth and attract **Yonga** from one place to another, rotating around Country. This prevented areas from becoming over-grazed and ensured they wouldn't be too far away for hunting.

“We know when and how to burn Country to keep the grass cover for Yonga.”

David Wardong Collard, Noongar

Kin

Out of respect for **Yonga**, young men do a **Yonga** dance as part of corroboree that mimics their movements. Their teeth (lower jaw) and bones are also used in ceremony.

Yonga are an example of a totemic species used by Noongars to maintain spiritual obligations to our ancestors.

“Yonga are a major animal in Noongar culture. They are something that our people always held onto. Yonga are holders of our knowledge and teach us about Country.”

David Wardong Collard, Noongar



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Results of Poor Management

Wrong-way fire

Over many decades Noongars have watched wrong-way fire impact on Country. Prescribed burning has happened too frequently, out of season and when it escapes, has led to major hot wildfire events. The dropping of 'bombs' (incendiaries) from helicopters and planes is also damaging sensitive wetland habitat this is important to **Yonga**.

Feral animals

Noongars are also concerned about the impact of feral animals such as pigs on the health of Country, which compete with **Yonga** for food and degrade their habitat.

Agricultural practices

As a consequence of Western agricultural practices, water is now stored and distributed artificially through dams, bores, troughs, etc. This has changed the abundance and distribution of **Yonga**. The extermination of dingoes in the south-west has also led to increased numbers of **Yonga**. This has led to damage to crops and reduced availability of feed for livestock. **Yonga** are a 'declared pest of agriculture' under the provisions of the Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976, administered by the Western Australian Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.



The first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives Ken Wyatt delivers his maiden speech to the House of Representatives in Canberra wearing a booka, Wednesday, Sept. 29, 2010. Photo: AAP Image/Alan Porritt.

Noongar Vision

Cultural burning and land management opportunities

Cultural burning can have a range of benefits for Country and Noongars. Our burns are cool and are designed to enable biodiversity to get out of the way. If contracts are given to Noongar organisations it will mean more employment, access to Country and greater recognition of our skills and Traditional knowledge. There are also carbon farming opportunities and other land management (weeds/ferals) contracts that could create an income stream for Noongar organisations and help build the Noongar land estate and in so doing secure **Boodja** (Country) for **Yonga**. Government procurement processes need to be improved to enable this.

Sustainable cultural practice

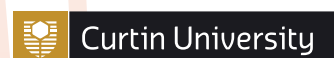
Hunting, gathering and Caring for Country are important activities and a cultural obligation for Noongars. Activities on **Boodja** to sustainably manage **Yonga** help to maintain our connection and ensure Traditional knowledge is passed on. We want greater access to Country and increased opportunities to care for Country. The link between our wellbeing and the health of Country needs to be better acknowledged.

Engagement

Noongars must be recognised as connected to the **Yonga**. We want to be included in all decision-making processes for the management of the **Yonga** as well as managing Noongar **Boodja**.



National Environmental Science Program



¹ Neaves, L. E., Zenger, K. R., Cooper, D. W., & Eldridge, M. D. B. (2010). Molecular detection of hybridization between sympatric kangaroo species in south-eastern Australia. *Heredity*, 104(5), 502-512.